MMR_0770 Stephen Drees

Stephen Drees
Earns
Master Model Railroader® #770

I was born with railroading in my genes. My father worked for the Southern Pacific for over 40 years at Number 1 Market Street in San Francisco, California, in the Communications Department. When he retired, he was the department's office manager.

Since my father worked for the railroad, he had a pass so the family could ride the Southern Pacific Railroad for free. I remember when I was very young, for a family outing, we would sometimes take the ferry, which the Southern Pacific owned, from the Ferry Terminal in San Francisco to Oakland. Sometimes, we visited my grandparents in Sacramento for a summer holiday. We would drive there, and since my father had to get back to work, we would stay for the week and take the train to Oakland and then the ferry to San Francisco where my father would pick us up.

My first train set was a Christmas gift to my brothers and me. It was a wind-up train set. My brothers and I would lay the track on the floor in our bedroom and run trains, having many hours of fun. This activity ignited those railroad genes in me. I had so much fun with the wind-up train set that I asked my parents for an electric one for the next Christmas. Sure enough, under the tree the following Christmas, there was a Marx O-27 train set. At first, my brothers and I would lay the track on the floor and run the train. Eventually my dad mounted the track on a sheet of plywood.

One summer vacation, we went to stay with a college friend of my mother on their ranch in Willits, California. On the return trip, my father and I discussed building a model railroad layout in the basement of our home in San Mateo, California. The house was built into the side of a hill, which provided the basement area for the layout, and we decided to build the layout in HO Scale. My father designed the layout, and he built the benchwork, trackwork, etc., which, you might say, was the infrastructure for the layout. At that time, Tru Scale roadbed was the thing to use. Since money was tight, my dad milled similar roadbed on his table saw. He also built his own turnouts and built the manual switch machine out of a pipe clamp. For the switch throws, he used ribs from an umbrella.

For my part, one of the things I did was build the rolling stock. I bought various model kits, such as Silver Streak and Varney, and I also built the Ambroid 5000 series kits. I still have them today and they are part of the rolling stock on my present layout. Also, I built the various buildings for the layout. Some were scratchbuilt from articles and plans in *Model Railroader,* and others were from kits. I also started to do some scenery but didn't get very far with it.

When my parents decided to use an artificial Christmas tree, my dad and I built a layout under it. He, of course, built the layout and did the trackwork. I then built the buildings from various kits.

When I was in high school, my dad and I joined the Peninsula Model Railroad Club located at the San Mateo County fairgrounds. This is where I met Bob Dupont and Ron Cerighino. We used to hang out together and do railroad-related outings such as going on the Sierra Railroad train trips, visiting the roundhouse in Jamestown, Westside Lumber Company, etc., and I became interested in logging railroads. My dad joined the NMRA, and we carpooled with Bob and Ron to the PCR meetings at various clubs around the Bay Area. Several times, Ron and I would explore railroad stuff around the Bay Area, and on one outing, we found the old Western Pacific roundhouse in Oakland. Stored there were some of the locomotives that were destined for the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. Bob made arrangements with John Allen several times, and we would make a long day of it and visit his layout in Carmel. What a thrill it was to see his spectacular model railroad! I took many pictures of his layout and still enjoy looking at them today.

At the various PCR meetings, I would enter some of my models in their contests. I built the Ambroid outside-braced caboose kit and superdetailed it. When I was in the Army, stationed at the Yuma Proving Grounds in Arizona, the NMRA National Convention in 1968 was held in San Francisco. My dad took my caboose and entered it in the model contest for me. I won the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen Brass Lantern Award.

In 1966, I graduated with a Civil Engineering degree from Humboldt State College, now called California State Polytechnical University, Humboldt, located in Arcata, California. This area was a logging railroad bonanza. My friend Dick Harrison and I would explore the area for logging railroad-related stuff. We befriended Henry Sorenson in nearby McKinleyville. Henry had a farm in McKinleyville where he built a three-foot narrow gauge railroad. Henry completely restored locomotive Mattole Lumber Co. No. 1 and Kiso Forest Railway No. 9, which he ran around his farm. On the 4th of July, he had a barbecue at his farm and invited people to ride the train, and I was also able to operate the steam

locomotive. He donated these locomotives to the California State Railroad Museum. They were on display for Railfair 99 in Sacramento.

After graduating from college, for my career, I went from building model railroad models to building major construction projects such as highways, dams, bridges, runways, etc. I put my model train stuff into storage as I lost the patience to work on my models due to the stresses of work. I delved into airplanes, earned my private pilot's license, and started to build an experimental kit airplane, a Glasair, but never finished it. During this time, I met my wonderful loving wife Molly and we got married on Cinco De Mayo in 2002.

After retirement from the conventional 40-hour (or, you might say, 60-hour) work week, I did some consulting work, but I also needed something to keep me out of trouble between assignments. I thought I would try golf because it was outdoors, but it was very frustrating. I thought about getting back into model railroading and still had models and equipment from my earlier years that I had stored. In between consulting assignments, I bought several Bar Mills kits and put them together. I looked for something more of a challenge and ran across SierraWest Scale Models kits. Constructing one of these kits and following the directions will make a very skilled modelmaker out of you. I joined the NMRA and then entered some of my models in the contest held at the Arizona Division Meetings. So, I had the bug again to get back into model railroading, and I was building again. I met Frank Baker from Phoenix at the Division meetings, and he took an interest in my work and mentored me while I got started again with the hobby.

After traveling around for work assignments with the unfinished airplane for about 30 years, I sold it, and it provided seed money to build a layout in my three-car plus-size garage and air-condition the garage to survive the hot summers in Tucson.

I used 3rd Planit, a CAD system for designing my model railroad. As an engineer, I had never used a CAD system before but learned how to use it to get a track plan and benchwork drawn and built. Work on the layout started in January 2016.

After building enough superdetailed structure kits and a scratchbuilt diorama of the Sturgeon Sawmill in Sonoma, California, I applied for my first certificate in the Achievement Program, Master Builder – Structures, in 2018. I was now interested in getting the rest of my achievement certificates and was encouraged by Paul Buhrke and Bruce Petrarca.

For my certificate for Master Builder – Cars, I superdetailed several Ambroid car kits, including the Matheson Dry Ice Reefer, Combination Poultry and Refrigerator car, and the Vinegar Tank car, as well as superdetailed a Labelle Parlor Car kit to fulfill the requirement for building a passenger car. Since I was into modeling logging operations, I needed a string of logging skeleton cars. I researched what they should look like online and scratchbuilt a string of four.

I started volunteering for various jobs within the Arizona Division to achieve the Association Volunteer certificate. This involved helping the committee for the 2019 PSR convention, holding several open houses of my layout, serving on the Arizona Division executive committee, and hosting the Division meetings in Tucson. I enjoy volunteering and engaging with other people who enjoy the hobby.

I now had one more certificate to go. Since I enjoy building models, I chose to pursue the Master Builder – Prototype Models Certificate. I decided to build a diorama of Schellville Station on the Northwestern Pacific. Schellville was the only gateway to the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Bay Area.

My model railroad layout is a freelanced short line railroad connecting to the Southern Pacific in the Southwest during the transition era. If I had known I was going for the Prototype Models certificate when I started its construction, I would have incorporated a prototype scene within it, saving time and effort for the many other phases of the hobby.

My wife is a great supporter of my hobby. She has enjoyed going to conventions and on road trips to different tourist railroads around the West (and other attractions along the way) with me.

Certificates Earned
Stephen Drees, MMR® #770

Master Builder – Structures
Master Builder – Cars
Master Builder – Scenery
Master Builder – Prototype Models
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
Association Volunteer

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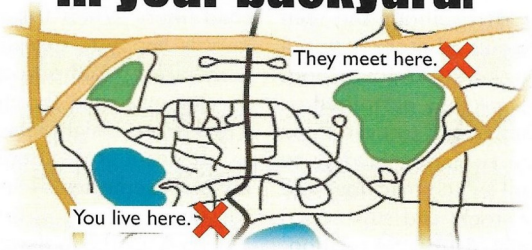

When you're a National Model Railroad Association member, you're never very far away from fellow model railroaders because you're automatically a member of your local Division. There are over 150 of them all across the country! Some hold monthly or quarterly meetings. Some sponsor swap meets. Some take tours to factories and prototype facilities. Some do it all and more.

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